



RI DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, RETARDATION &  
HOSPITALS

**ABCs for Parents: Helping your child stay healthy and happy  
during a flu outbreak**

**A – Ask your children** what they have heard about the flu and what they’re thinking. Kids hear a lot of scary stuff about the flu. Be **AVAILABLE**. Spend time with your kids.

**B – Be prepared** to hear a mixture of information. There is a lot of confusion. Don’t ignore or minimize your kids concerns or blame them for the wrong information. **Be** ready with simple, age appropriate information. **Be** reassuring. **Be** there.

**C – Comfort** your children by letting them know how you and doctors are prepared to **care** for them. Tell them that experts all over the world are doing all they can to prevent and stop the flu.

**D – Don’t** overwhelm your children with flu details – most kids just need to know the adults they trust are dealing with it so they can go on with their lives.

**E – Exercise** is important for your children’s health – help your kids find t least one healthy activity that requires regular aerobic exercise, and support their efforts! Unless the doctor says otherwise, taking a brisk walk every day (even in cold weather) can be fun and healthy!

**F – Find comfort** and strength in personal and/or spiritual beliefs – it’s important that parents have somewhere to turn for renewing themselves. Your children may find comfort in similar beliefs.

**G – Get organized** with inside learning activities and games – this will prepare you for “at home” days due to sick days or school closings. And you’ll be ready for any rainy day!

**H – Help** your children to **know the difference between their allergies or colds and the flu**. You don’t want them to get worried if they sneeze. Let them know most people who get the flu get help and get better. They especially need to know this because “flu deaths” are reported in the news.

**I – Identify backup plans** ahead of time in the event you or the children need to remain home due to illness or school closings. This pre-planning will reduce stress later by avoiding last minute arrangement for you and your family.

**J – Jot down** family and emergency numbers and tuck a copy in your children’s backpack. Knowing where to find mommy or daddy makes it easier to go off to school.

**K – Know what your children’s schools are doing** regarding flu prevention, and what their friends are saying about it. Talk about school flu prevention activities with your kids. Support and add to school efforts by teaching your children good health habits and providing materials if needed.

**L – Learn what comforts your children** and help them engage in healthy self-soothing behaviors. Falling asleep to soft music? Playing the guitar? Shooting hoops? Sitting outside and feeling the sun and breezes? Encourage self-care activities to help your children reduce stress and promote resilience.

**M – Maintain a daily routine** whenever possible – routines can be comforting for people of all ages, especially when the world is changing around them.

**N – No one person or group is to blame** for a flu outbreak. Know that your kids may hear negative comments about those who are sick. They may also see fear and disrespect shown to sick people and their families. Be ready to address this and encourage questions and discussion. Report any in-school bullying to school authorities. Be a role model for your kids.

**O – Off with the TV** during “flu updates” and other bad news. Reports of “flu deaths” are too scary for young kids and too much “flu information” is likely to increase everyone’s worries.

**P – Provide healthy meals.** Let kids know that eating a balanced diet helps keep their bodies healthy and makes them less likely to become sick. **Nutrition IN** helps keep **flu OUT**.

**Q – Question your own fear reactions** to news of the flu. Your children look to you for cues as to how worried they should be. If you think your fears are getting in the way of daily responsibilities, you could benefit from talking with informed and supportive friends or a health care provider.

**R – Realize your role** in nurturing your children’s abilities to identify and discuss their thoughts and feelings. Remember not all children easily put their concerns into words. Spending special time together may allow for a story to come out. Be patient. Thoughts and feelings can be complex and tricky to express. It’s worth the wait.

**S – Self-care skills** can last a lifetime! Teach your children to care for themselves by balancing their daily life: studying hard, getting enough sleep, planning “down time” each day, having fun, eating well and exercising. Knowing they’re taking actions to promote their good health and prevent infection can give them a sense of control and reduce their worries.

**T – Teach** your children **good health** habits: cough/sneeze into your elbow, wash hands often, keep hands away from mouth, nose and eyes and stay 6’ away from those who are sick.

**U – Utilize simple messages** with kids: “We are doing things every day to stay healthy.” E.g. Hand washing, eating healthy, exercising, etc.); Come talk to me if you have questions.

**V – Voice praise** when and where kids can overhear you. They’ll believe you even more when they hear you singing their praises to someone else.

**W – Watch for symptoms** of too much stress and worry. These can show up in little ones as physical problems and in children of any age as changes in behavior, mood and energy level – or over-reactions to everyday demands. Seek help from experts when you need it.

**X – EXamine your children’s schedule** and adjust it as necessary. A little EXTRA comfort or self-care during the height of flu season can go a long way toward prevention.

**Y – Say YES** to giving and receiving ideas and support from other parents. Exchanging information and ideas can be comforting to all.

**Z – Zero in on** that can do for your kids and know your limits. ***Remember, you’re only human!***

For health related questions – [www.health.rh.gov](http://www.health.rh.gov) or call the Flu Hotline at 222-8022.

For more stress related information – [www.mhrh.rh.gov](http://www.mhrh.rh.gov).

*Thanks to the University of Connecticut Center for Trauma Response, Recovery and Preparedness for the concept development of this brochure.*